

Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing

Assessment
Highlights
2009

GRADE

3

English Language Arts

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This document contains assessment highlights from the 2009 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, test blueprints, and student performance on the achievement test that was administered in 2009. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* both in *Part A: Writing* and on selected items from the 2009 *Part B: Reading* test. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with the multi-year and detailed school reports that are available to schools via the extranet. **Assessment highlights reports** for all achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 3, 6, and 9 Français/French Language Arts and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) will be **posted on the Alberta Education website every year** in the fall.

Released test items, which contained approximately 25% of the total number of test items from previously secured achievement test, were mailed to school administrators each fall from 2004 to 2006 and have been made available to teachers only in print form because of copyright limitations.

Every second year, as of the fall of 2007, **a complete test** for all achievement testing subjects and grades (except grades 6 and 9 Social Studies; grades 3, 6, and 9 Français/French language Arts; and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) will be **mailed** to school administrators in conjunction with the assessment highlights report for that year. In this way, teachers will receive complete forms of achievement tests for classroom use. The parts of those tests that are released in print form for which electronic copyright permission is received will subsequently be posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, test section and item description for each test item will also be included. These materials, along with the Program of Studies and subject bulletin, provide information that can be used to inform instructional practice.

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The Alberta Education Internet address is www.education.alberta.ca.

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Part A: Writing—2009 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2009 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; a description of the writing assignment; and the achievement standards.

Writing Assignment and Reporting Categories	Description of Writing Assignments	Achievement Standards
Reporting Category	A picture prompt is presented to students. The picture is designed to help stimulate the students' imagination and direct their writing. Before students discuss the picture prompt and organize their ideas on the planning pages provided, the test description, instructions, and information about the picture prompt are read out loud by the teacher.	Students' achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following standard descriptors: Excellent Proficient Satisfactory Limited Poor Insufficient
Content* (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose) Students select appropriate details to describe events and characters. Events and/or actions should be plausible within the context established by the writer.		
Organization* (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole) Students organize ideas, events, and details in a coherent sequence.		
Sentence Structure (structuring sentences effectively) Students use a variety of sentence types and structures appropriately.		
Vocabulary (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively) Students use words and expressions appropriately and effectively.		
Conventions (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students communicate clearly by adhering to appropriate spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.		

* *Content and Organization are weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the other categories*

Part A: Writing—2009 Student Achievement

In 2009, 92% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 15.9% of students who wrote achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are 1.5% higher at the *acceptable standard* and slightly higher (0.9%) at the *standard of excellence* than previous administrations of *Part A: Writing* of the achievement test.

Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

The quality of the writing on the 2009 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test is consistent with that of previous years. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving writing standards for each writing assignment and reporting category.

		Narrative Writing Assignment				
		Reporting Category				
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	4.0	3.4	4.5	4.3	6.3
	4.5	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.3	5.1
Proficient	4.0	15.5	13.9	17.8	16.8	18.0
	3.5	14.6	14.7	13.3	13.4	11.5
Satisfactory	3.0	47.1	47.1	43.3	49.4	33.2
	2.5	7.1	8.4	8.3	6.2	10.0
Limited	2.0	6.5	7.5	7.5	5.0	14.2
	1.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.2	1.0
Poor	1.0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5
Insufficient / No Response	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2

*Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2009, approximately 64% of papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third adjudicating reading. The third reading rescore rate was 8%.

Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2009 Student Achievement

During the 2009 scoring session, 146 teachers from throughout the province scored 39 485 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers.

On *Part A: Writing* of the 2009 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test, students who wrote the test achieved an average of 22.8 out of a total raw score of 35 (65.1%).

Narrative Writing Assignment

In the 2009 Narrative Writing Assignment, students were required to use a picture prompt to write a narrative response. The colour picture shows two boys and a girl. They are in a forest which has a path going through it. The sun is shining through the trees. One boy is kneeling down on one knee and pointing to a footprint that he sees on the path. The other boy is leaning over and looking at the footprint. The girl is standing behind the boy who is leaning over and she has a worried look on her face. The girl is looking away from both of the boys.

Training for the marking session always emphasizes the need to look at the strengths of the writer and to only mark what is written. Markers conscientiously use their exemplar documents to support the scoring criteria in helping them distinguish between the scoring categories. Each response is to be reviewed according to each category in the scoring criteria. Every effort is made to score each response in a valid and reliable manner.

Students responded in a variety of ways to the picture prompt, bringing their prior knowledge and experience into their writing. Students who were adept writers made personal connections with some or all of the details in the picture. Colour, the characters, and the forest setting in the prompt engaged the students and resulted in responses that contained a variety of interesting events. Teachers who took part in the marking session noted that students were able to effectively develop the events, and due to the adventurous setting of the prompt, students wrote enthusiastically. Students achieving the *standard of excellence* had well-developed and detailed events, effective connections, and descriptive vocabulary allowing the markers to more clearly discern voice.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a few of the appropriate responses that related to the picture prompt at the *acceptable standard*:

- “Then they ran, but Timmy had an idea. He through a burning stick and through it at the grizzly and they went home and ate a pot of soup.”
- “One day me and my brother and sister went into the forest. We were walking along. We were having a good time. Suddenly we heard noises coming from the trees.”
- “Christa exclaimed let’s tell Dad about the bear. O.K. said James. And that is exactly what they did.”

These are examples of Grade 3 students’ writing. Some spelling and punctuation have been corrected for readability purposes.

Each of these examples illustrates appropriate ideas presented in a straightforward manner. The ideas were supported by general details. The writing was organized in a logical manner that was generally sustained throughout the response. A logical ending was provided.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a few of the appropriate responses that related to the picture prompt at the *standard of excellence*:

- “They were silent as they walked through the woods looking everywhere. ‘I smell something good,’ whispered John. Crick. ‘What was that?’ James said. ‘I don’t know,’ said John. Crick, crick, snap. ‘There it is again.’ ”
- “Soon Mary saw two glowing eyes glaring at them. Mary screamed. ‘What’s wrong Mary?’ asked Dannis. Mary pointed at the bush.”
- “The boys wondered what it was, but Miriam knew. She didn’t want them to be jealous, yet. She said they’d better sit down and rest for a bit. Samuel liked that. He was famished. Michael was exhausted from all his ‘hard work,’ and Miriam was excited.”

These are examples of Grade 3 students’ writing. Spelling and some punctuation have been corrected for readability purposes.

These examples illustrate how some students were stimulated by the picture prompt. In their writing, these students supported specific detailed events that were relevant and original in thought. The writing was purposeful and the connections were developed and maintained throughout the response.

Approximately 64% of the papers written were scored locally and submitted to Alberta Education. A high level of reliability was achieved between the local score and the central score. The third reading rescore rate was 8%.

Part B: Reading—2009 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2009, 88.2% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 37.9% of students who wrote the test achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are slightly higher results for the students achieving the *acceptable standard* and almost 3% higher results for the students achieving the *standard of excellence* than previous administrations of *Part B: Reading* of the achievement test.

Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2009 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 28.7 out of a total score of 40 (71.7%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2009 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement Average Raw Score and Percentage
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
<p>Understanding Main Ideas/Details</p> <p>The student should be able to identify key details and main ideas, differentiate between main and supporting characters, recognize character motivation and explicit relationships between events and characters, and categorize ideas.</p>			<p>12/17</p> <p>(71%)</p>
<p>Organization of Ideas and Relationships Between Form and Content</p> <p>The student should be able to identify genre (stories, poetry, plays, reports, and articles), organize features of story structure, use text and typographical features, recognize authors' techniques, and determine an author's purpose.</p>			<p>5/7</p> <p>(71%)</p>
<p>Associating Meaning</p> <p>The student should be able to associate meanings of words, expressions, and literary devices from prior knowledge and contextual clues.</p>			<p>5.1/7</p> <p>(73%)</p>
<p>Synthesizing Ideas</p> <p>The student should be able to draw conclusions by relating what is known to new information, and assess the plausibility of ideas and situations in literature.</p>			<p>6.5/9</p> <p>(72%)</p>
<p>Provincial Student Achievement Average Raw Score and Percentage</p>	<p>9.9/13</p> <p>(76%)</p>	<p>18.8/27</p> <p>(69.6%)</p>	<p>Part B: Reading</p> <p>Total Test Raw Score = 40</p>

Part B: Reading—*Commentary on 2009 Student Achievement*

The following is a discussion of specific areas of strength and weakness demonstrated by students who wrote the 2009 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In *Part B: Reading*, students constructed meaning from text using personal experiences, knowledge, and feelings. Students were able to demonstrate effective reading skills by focusing on the central theme and the critical features of a passage to successfully retrieve main ideas from the narratives and informational texts presented. When reading informational texts, students were able to decode and interpret information from texts and visuals to answer the questions. Students were able to use prior knowledge and contextual clues to comprehend the meaning of unknown words. Students were able to go beyond the literal interpretation of the text, synthesize information, and make predictions about possible future events. When synthesizing, students drew conclusions and were able to assess the plausibility of ideas. Students who performed well took time to read the passages carefully and were able to refer back to the passage when choosing the best alternative.

Types of Reading Passages

There are two types of reading passages on the provincial achievement test: informational texts and narrative/poetic texts. Stories and poems comprise almost 68% of the test. In 2009, students were able to correctly answer an average of 18.8/27 (69.6%) the questions based on the stories and poems that they read. This reflects a slight decrease (1.1%) from the 2008 test. About 32% of the test is based on information passages. Students accurately answered an average of 9.9/13 (76%) of questions based on these texts. This reflects a slight increase (0.6%) from the previous year.

Reporting Categories of Questions

Understanding Main Ideas/Details

- In this reporting category, students should be able to identify key details and main ideas, differentiate between main and supporting characters, recognize character motivation and explicit relationships between events and characters, and categorize ideas.
- Students were able to answer an average of 12/17 (71%) of these types of questions correctly. This is the same average number as the previous year.

Associating Meaning

- Students demonstrate their ability to associate meanings of words, expressions, and literary devices when they answer questions from this reporting category. They use their prior knowledge as well as contextual clues when completing these questions.
- An average of 5.1/7 (73%) of associating meaning types of questions were answered correctly. This number reflects an increase of 2% compared to the previous year.

Organization of Ideas and Relationships Between Form and Content

- Questions in this reporting category require students to identify genre (stories, poetry, plays, reports, and articles), organize features of story structure, use text and typographical features, recognize the authors' techniques, and determine an author's purpose.
- Students were able to answer an average of 5/7 (71%) of these types of questions accurately. This is a decrease of 2% from the previous year's test.

Synthesizing Ideas

- Students should be able to answer questions where they need to draw conclusions by relating what is known to new information as well as assess the plausibility of ideas and situations in literature.
- When addressing questions that required the synthesis of ideas, students were able to answer an average of 6.5/9 (72%) questions correctly. This is a decrease of 4% from the previous year.

Achievement Testing Program Support Documents

The Alberta Education website contains several documents that provide valuable information about various aspects of the achievement testing program. To access these documents, go to the Alberta Education website at www.education.alberta.ca. On the home page, click on the tab *Teachers*, then click on the link *Provincial Testing*. Next click on the link *Achievement Tests*, and then click on one of the specific links under the *Achievement Tests* heading to access the following documents.

Achievement Testing Program General Information Bulletin

The *General Information Bulletin* is a compilation of several documents produced by Alberta Education and is intended to provide superintendents, principals, and teachers with easy access to information about all aspects of the achievement testing program. Sections in the bulletin contain information pertaining to schedules and significant dates; security and test rules; test administration and directives; test accommodations; field testing; resources and web documents; calculator and computer policies; test marking and results; samples, forms, and letters; and Learner Assessment contacts.

Subject Bulletins

At the beginning of each school year, subject bulletins are posted on the Alberta Education website for all achievement test subjects for grades 3, 6, and 9. Each bulletin provides descriptions of assessment standards, test design and blueprinting, and scoring guides (for grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts) as well as suggestions for preparing students to write the tests and information about how teachers can participate in test development activities.

Writing Samples

For achievement tests in grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts, writing samples have been designed to be used by teachers and students to enhance students' writing and to assess this writing relative to the standards inherent in the scoring guides for the *Part A: Writing* achievement tests. The writing samples documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales, student self-assessment checklists, and scoring categories and criteria for the writing assignments.

Previous Achievement Tests and Answer Keys

All January achievement tests (parts A and B) for Grade 9 semestered students are secured and must be returned to Alberta Education. All May/June achievement tests are secured except *Part A* of grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts. Unused or extra copies of only these *Part A* tests may be kept at the school after administration. Teachers may also use the print versions of released items that have been mailed to schools and/or the tests that are posted on the Alberta Education website.

Parent Guides

Each school year, print versions of the *Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing* for grades 3, 6, and 9 are mailed to schools and posted on the Alberta Education website. Each guide presents answers to frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program; descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject; and excerpts from the *Curriculum Handbook for Parents* identifying what students should know and be able to do in each subject by the end of grades 3, 6, and 9.

Involvement of Teachers

Teachers of grades 3, 6, and 9 are encouraged to take part in a variety of activities related to the achievement testing program. These activities include item development, test validation, field testing, and marking. In addition, regional consortia can make arrangements for teacher in-service workshops on topics such as Interpreting Achievement Test Results to Improve Student Learning.